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Media-induced change in political organizations? Interest groups and their reaction to the media

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Abstract
The growing importance of the media, as suggested by the concept of "mediatization", supposedly affects the "playing field" on which political organisations are active. From a neo-institutionalist perspective, we claim that the media can be perceived as constituting one part of the institutional environment of civil society organisations (CSOs) and interest groups. We operationalize structural changes in the organisations as changes in either rules applicable to communication practices or resources dedicated to communication. These reactions in the form of structural changes within the organisations, which can be attributed to the hypothesized growing influence of the media, are labelled "mediatization". In our research project, we look at CSOs and interest groups in Germany, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Here, we present first empirical results, based on the analysis of the Swiss dataset. We discuss which communication instruments are implemented by which interest groups in their external communication (i.e. to policy-makers, to journalists or the public), their internal communication (to their members and supporters) and in monitoring their external environments. Data on how CSOs and interest groups evaluate the importance of the different instruments in their communication repertoire are presented. Thus, media-induced organisational change in interest groups can be assessed.

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1. Interest groups and the media

Among the challenges interest groups are facing today, the relationship between interest groups and what is commonly referred to as the "(news) media" is considered to be of major importance. This relationship, however, has attracted only little scholarly interest so far (Vowe, 2007, p. 465), both in communication science[1], and in political science, as the study of interest groups as a whole remains to be a rather scarcely investigated area of research in political science at large (Beyers, Eising & Maloney, 2008, p. 1103). The importance of studying how interest groups and the media deal (act, react, and interact) with each other is underlined by the fact that the changes we can observe here go hand-in-hand with several other challenges interest groups are confronted with. Processes such as the horizontal and vertical differentiation of the interest groups system, globalisation or Europeanization, result in an increase in the interest groups politically active (Willems & von Winter, 2007, p. 26-33; Vowe, 2007, p. 481-484). The fragmentation and growing heterogeneity of societal interests (Jun, 2009, p. 32), caused by individualization and pluralisation, pressurizes the motives for societal engagement. The common denominator of these challenges is their connection to the importance of communication transmitted by the media, as they are a seen as vital agents in reaching, targeting, and mobilising wider audiences (Heldman, 2008, p. 340). Thus, we perceive of the relationship between interest groups and the media as embedded in a society-wide change of how interest groups organize, aggregate, articulate and intermediate societal interest with the aim of shaping public policies (Beyers, Eising & Maloney, 2008, p. 1103).

What we witness today is not only a "revolution of communication technologies" (Willems & von Winter, 2007, p. 33), represented by the advent and diffusion of new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), but more general the coping of interest groups with a media system that has undergone significant changes in the last decades in most Western democracies (Schudson, 2002, p. 250). Political and ideological ties between political actors and the media have been reduced to a minimum and the media have emerged as a sector with a logic of its own – a logic which is often commercially dominated (Jarren & Donges, 2011, p. 21-23). Media organizations are to a much lesser degree programmatically or organizationally connected to representatives of the political system. Mass media have not only spread in a quantitative and qualitative manner, resulting in an increase in the sheer number of media and programs available, but led also to new forms of media such as offerings for specific target groups or journalistic content accessible online. Additionally, the power and speed of the media in communicating messages has increased (news media are available 24/7), and the media are present in nearly all areas of society. The media have become more and more the precondition of the information and communication routine for political actors. Without media, there is no durable, stable communication between political actors, or between the political actors and the citizens (Jarren & Donges, 2011, p. 23). This "constraint" (Jarren & Donges, 2011, p. 23) or "pressure" (Vowe, 2007, p. 484) could lead to the allocation of resources to the corresponding activities, resulting in organizational change within the political interest groups under study, as similar changes have been observed up to a certain degree for political parties (Donges, 2008). The actual observation and extent of this organizational change, induced by the media, however, is an open empirical question, for which we will try to trace first empirical evidence in the following.

2. "Mediatization" as media-induced change

Before presenting our theoretical concept of mediatization, it is necessary to look in more detail at what we actually mean, when we speak of "the media". We will then explain why we think it is fruitful to perceive of the media as "institutions".

The media are on the one hand technical channels of communications with specific capabilities, on the other hand organized actors with specific interests, institutions with specific rules, and a social system with a specific function within society (Saxer, 1999). We will base our definition of

[1] Some notable exceptions to this conclusion are Thrall (2006), Vowe (2007), Hackenbroch (1998), among others.

mediatization on the assumption that the media can be seen as a distinct type of institutions. The media combine organizational aspects with normative factors, and thus constitute a system of norms and rules which considerably stabilizes modern societies (Jarren, 1998). More generally, we perceive of institutions as environments for organizations ("environment-as-institution-approach"). What interests us here is the effect of media as an institution on organizations. Our approach is hence different to the understanding of the news media as a political institution which is predominant in American literature on the topic (see, for example, Schudson, 2002; Cook, 1998, 2006). We aim to raise the question "with what effect", widely investigated in communication research on a micro level (i.e. on individuals and groups) to an organizational (meso) level (Donges, 2006, p. 564-565). Institutions are defined as durable systems of rules, which both constrain and enable social actions. Institutions thus encompass rules in forms of normative expectations (how should actors behave, resulting in certain roles within organizations or organizational routines), regulatory rules (either supported by public opinion or law (Meyer/Rowan, 1977, p. 341), constitutive and representative rules (Donges, 2006, p. 566). This last set of rules are seen as patters and templates upon which actors construct their "reality", as rules "that involve shared logics or modes of reasoning that help to create shared understanding of reality that is 'taken for granted'" (Scott, 1994, p. 67). Thus, actors are always coined by institutions, as already the creation of their preferences happens in dependence of the institutional environments they act in. Only by enabling social actions, systems of social rules become institutions.

We specifically see the media as institutions of (political) organizations because they constitute a durable system of rules which constrains and enables social action (Donges, 2006, p. 568). We are further able to trace the influences of the four types of institutional rules outlined above on organizations. Media exert a normative influence on organizations, as they provide the creation of mutual certainty of expectations. All relevant organizations can become the possible subject of media coverage and have to prepare for such, also pre-emptively. The reactions of organizations are visible in structural changes, for example in installing communication departments or the systematic monitoring of their environments. Organizations observe that they are or might be observed by the media. Through these observations, organizations see themselves as part of the environments of other organizations which is thus the precondition that organizations are able to perceive the expectations of other organizations, and to act accordingly. In addition, the media act in a regulatory way on organizations, as they structure courses of actions and constrain the action repertoire of organizations. News values, for example, which determine to a relatively high degree which stories are covered by the media, can be seen as a limiting factor to the communication of organizations – especially for organizations in need of public resonance. Moreover, the media are no neutral conveyor of communication, but a system structuring how an organization perceives its environment and chooses its preferences. The logic of the media, its selection routines, sets of presentations and interpretations thus also form the perception of the organizational environments. The effect of media on organizations can also be seen in the fact that individuals and organizations have a sense of how the media operate and on the effect they can have. However, these assumptions are often not questioned, but are seen as representative rules or implicitness: "Existing media logic is so incorporated into contemporary urban society that media professionals and the public take for granted that 'seeing' social phenomena through media logic is 'normal'" (Altheide & Snow, 1979, p. 237). The media can have an effect on society because organizations assume that the media are powerful, an assumption which is 'taken for granted' and no longer questioned: "Media are powerful because people have adopted a media logic. Since people perceive, interpret, and act on the basis of the existing media logic, that logic has become a way of life" (Altheide & Snow, 1979, p. 237).

In this institutional approach (Hjarvard, 2008; Donges, 2008), mediatization does not only mean that the media have earned a certain degree of autonomy, as outlined above, but also that they have gained the status of an independent institution. The media are constrained by certain (implicit or explicit) rules, characterized by resource allocations. It is exactly these two features which stock the

institution with some degree of autonomy, in relation to the world around it (Hjarvard, 2008, p. 116). These considerations lead us to the basic assumption of *mediatization*, namely that the mass media are of growing importance. Mediatization should be understood in a dynamic perspective, perceived as a process of social change, in which the influence of the media on actors, other institutions and their (inter-)actions is growing or has grown, respectively, in comparison to other, non-media actors or institutions. In this view, mediatization is seen as an adaptation to media logic (Altheide & Snow, 1979; Mazzoleni, 1987) and implies a change in the criteria and rationalities after which actors act and decide upon.

In a more general sense, mediatization can be perceived of as a "double-sided process of high modernity in which the media on the one hand emerge as an independent institution with a logic of its own that other social institutions have to accommodate to. On the other hand, media simultaneously become an integrated part of other institutions like politics, work, family and religion as more and more of these institutional activities are performed through both interactive and mass media" (Hjarvard, 2008, p. 105). The process, however, cannot be analysed without reference to its context: "The extent to which the situation amounts to actual submission or only greater dependence on media will vary between institutions and society" (Hjarvard, 2008, p. 113). It is further necessary to distinguish between the broader concept of mediation (Livingstone, 2009) and the more specific phenomenon of mediatization. Mediation is used to describe the "concrete act of communication by means of a medium in specific social context" (Hjarvard, 2008, p. 114) – for example, the decision of a politician to address his voters in a blog instead of a newspaper may influence the form and content of his or her message (i.e. his or her 'communication') and thus may have an effect on the communicative relation between the politician and the respective electorate. This, however, does not necessarily imply that the choice of the politician to communicate on- or offline, whether via blog or newspaper, results in a notable impact on politics as a social institution (Hjarvard, 2008, p. 114). Mediatization, however, would mean just that: "a more long-lasting process, whereby social and cultural institutions and modes of interaction are changed as a consequence of the growth of the media's influence" (Hjarvard, 2008, p. 114).

Lammers and Barbour (2006, p. 372) hold that "multiple institutions influence organizing in multiple settings". When an organization communicates with its environment (or perhaps more precisely: when individuals do so on behalf of an organization), it must take into account different institutions (Lammers & Barbour, 2006, p. 366). We should thus expect "references to institutions in interorganizational and external organizational communication, and that evaluations of the success of that communication will depend on those references" (Lammers & Barbour, 2006, p. 366). Furthermore, in analysing the communication of political interest groups we gain access to the reflections organizational members raise towards their institutional environment. We are thus able to discern more precisely the distinctive features of a certain institutional environment as perceived by the adherent organizational members (Lammers & Barbour, 2006, p. 366). In short: the communication of organizations could help us in analysing the characteristics of a relationship between an organization and an institutional environment.

In theory, political organizations such as interest groups react to the increased relevance of mass media outlined above by professionalising (Negrine & Lilleker, 2002) and extending their organizational communication (Hackenbroch, 1998, p. 483; Vowe, 2007, p. 483-484). We hold that the media constitute a part of the institutional environment of political organizations (Donges, 2008, p. 217-218) and that the use and implementation of communication instruments by political interest groups is a reaction to the quantitative and qualitative differentiation expressed by mediatization. The institutional environment, in which an organization is embedded, facilitates decisions for the political interest group in offering certain guidance. This guidance can be characterized as practices which are intersubjectively accepted as rational solutions to cope with distinctive problems (Schimank, 2007, p. 164-165). We thus propose a definition of mediatization of politics on an organizational level with

three central dimensions: Perception, structure and behaviour (Donges, 2008; Vogel, 2010). Mediatization is seen as a reaction of political organizations to their perception of an increased importance of the media and communication. This perception implies changes in organizational structure (rules and resources for communication) and organizational behaviour. This reaction is the consequence of the organization's perception that the media and mediated communication gain in importance in their environment. This condition requires that organizations are able to perceive change in their environment, to decide that they are relevant, and to act accordingly. Thus, the reaction implies (and gets visible through) change in organizational structure (rules and resources for communication) and behaviour (amount and form of communication output). It is this perception, structure, and behaviour which we can assess empirically. The degree of changes caused by mediatization depends on country specific contexts like the political and the media system. National political traditions matter. News media logics might force political organizations to implement structural changes, but since they are loosely coupled systems of action with a high degree of path dependency, they are unable to simply adjust or subordinate to a news media logic. Especially larger political organizations with a high degree of internal federalism need to balance the requirements of a professional media communication (e.g. on speed) and internal factions (e.g. on participation or at least consultation). A key finding from earlier studies was that mediatization defined as response of organizations to the news media logic takes place, but not to the expected extent (Donges, 2008; Vogel, 2010).

At this point, it is important to emphasize that the media constitute only one part of the institutional environments of political organization (Donges, 2008, p. 218). We perceive of mediatization not as of a causal model of cause and effect of isolated social processes, but rather as of a complex interplay of different influencing factors. This fact means that political interest groups have other relevant institutional environments, besides the media, and that the organizations under scrutiny have a certain "room for manoeuvre", how they cope with the demands of a hypothesized "media society" (Donges, 2008, p. 218). To highlight these alternatives in the action repertoire available to interest groups, we think of mediatization as a reaction, and not as a simple adaptation to the increased significance of the mass media (Donges, 2008, p. 217). It is neither a free strategic option nor an enforcement of adaptation. Mediatization has to be treated as an interaction where some decisions are more probable than others, but not determined.

3. Defining Interest Groups

Studies on interest groups are done, as outlined by Berkhout (2010), in various research areas, ranging from social movements (Roth & Rucht, 2008; Snow, Soule & Kriesi, 2004), business interest organizations (Eising, 2009; Streeck et al., 2006), civil society organizations (Finke, 2007; Jobert & Kohler-Koch, 2008, Maloney & Rossteutscher, 2007; Liebert & Trenz, 2010), labour unions (Schroeder & Wessels, 2010; Streeck & Hassel, 2003), the firm as political actor (Coen & Grant, 2006; Hart, 2010), to the interventionist politics of bureaucratic agencies. In the few studies in communication science, the focus is placed on advertisement campaigns, public relations and public affairs of associations, consultancies and lobby groups (Hackenbroch, 1998; Steiner & Jarren, 2009; Vowe, 2007; Hoffjann & Stahl, 2010).

Following the definition proposed by Beyers, Eising, and Maloney (2008), we focus on the aspects of political interest, organization and informality as characteristics of interest groups. In addition, interest groups share the aspect of civility. Political interest refers to a strong orientation on monitoring and influencing policy processes. Most groups have particularistic agendas, which also distinguish them from political parties. Especially business interest associations, but also groups that advocate public interest concentrate their activities on few policy fields. Groups that lack political interest can thus be excluded. The large majority of groups are policy amateurs and not continuously politically active. In relation to the overall number of registered associations, relatively few interest groups regularly and professionally work on political issues. The aspect of organization relates to an institutionalized

infrastructure. Groups are collectivities with an organizational context inside its boundaries. They can thus be perceived as corporate actors and can be distinguished from non-associational interests, waves of public opinion and non-institutionalized social movements. Interest groups get visible and have an organizational core with internal hierarchies (a general secretary, a president, a board etc.). Informality indicates that groups do not stand for elections and refrain from claiming public offices. Their informality not only means that their position on the political field is sometimes fragile; informality also refers to some of the tactics that are used in the pursuit of their goals. For the political activities of groups, the distinction between an "inside" and "outside game" can be made (Heldmann, 2008, p. 340). The inside game refers to mostly informal methods such as lobbying, information provision or direct exchange with members of the parliament or the administration. The outside game includes all forms of public tactics of influencing politics (Heldmann, 2008, p. 340; Vowe, 2007, p. 467). Mass media play a vital role in the outside game because they are regarded as exerting influence on public opinion. In this outside game, interest groups take advantage of all sorts of communication means available to them in order to shape public policy in their direction (Heldmann, 2008, p. 340). Civility is a mode of behaviour that is usually neglected because it is taken for granted: The activities are based on principles of non-violence. The vast majority of groups adhere to the laws and regulations of the political entity in which they are embedded. Consultations, debates, dialogues, peaceful protests and law-abiding modes of addressing and solving conflicts are used. Bribery, often associated with lobbying and interest groups, is an illegal activity, and although an often referenced stereotype, rather an exception.

Interest groups are deeply steeped in national political traditions and are firmly embedded into the wider political system of their countries. As this paper focuses on Switzerland, it is necessary to introduce this less well known political system of intermediaries briefly. As Katzenstein argued, "Swiss democracy is geared to pressure groups; it is a form of government calculated to bring such groups into existence and give them power. The system could conceivably continue for a time without parties, but without pressure groups it would not work at all" (Katzenstein, 1984, p. 112). Switzerland features a rather unique form of 'democratic corporatism' (Zeigler, 1993). Kriesi and Trechsel conclude that Swiss politics is characterized by "a centralized and concentrated system of interest associations; a voluntary and informal coordination of the various interests in continuous political negotiations between their associations; political parties and the various branches of public administration; and an ideology favouring social partnership" (Kriesi & Trechsel, 2008, p. 99).

In general, the 'intermediary system' (Rucht, 2007) in Switzerland is well institutionalized and interest groups are rather close to the core executive. They are influential in the political process not only via consultation processes. Due to the provisions of direct democracy, they can also mobilize members to initiate public debates or call for referenda on their aims and objectives. Procedures like pre-parliamentary consultations ("Vernehmlassungsverfahren") guarantee that also marginal interests are heard. These options are accessible also for small or new interest organizations that occupy outsider positions. In recent years, the changing landscape of interest representation has also moved for-hire lobbyists and public affairs agencies onto the ground (Hoffmann, Steiner & Vogel, 2007). Increasingly, big companies establish their own parliamentary affairs sections as parallel venues to address politics, thereby weakening the interest associations (Kriesi & Trechsel, 2008, p. 102).

4. Research Questions

Our research questions consequently deal with the possible traces of organizational change we might observe and which can be attributed to a supposedly growing importance of the media. A large part of organizational theory assumes that organizational structures and organizational environments require some kind of 'fit' between them to keep organizations working efficiently and securing their survival. The argument behind our conception of mediatization of politics claims that the political environment changes due to an increasing relevance of the mass media. In this sense, also political organizations have to find ways to deal with these changes. A most significant way to adapt to changed

environmental conditions is to restructure organizational properties. We thus look at the three dimensions of our definition of mediatization (perception, structure, and behaviour) to trace media-induced change in political organizations – i.e. political interest groups.

RQ1 (Perception): How do political interest groups perceive the importance and role of the media in their day-to-day-activities?

In this set of questions, we are most interested in the actual importance interest groups attribute to the media in general and compare it to other institutions or actors with which interest groups interact with, such as politicians, parties, the public, their own members, or other interest groups. We further compare the importance of different types of media (such as TV, print, or online) and try to track changes in the significance of different instruments the instruments groups implement in their communication activities. However, as we do not make an analysis over time, we have to contend ourselves with the perceived increase of the media.

RQ2 (Structure): How did the political interest groups under scrutiny change their organizational structure (rules and resources for communication) in order to cope with the media which is supposedly to be of growing importance?

We assess this question by analysing the current amount of resources which are dedicated to communication to gain an overview of the *status quo*. How much does an organization spend on communication annually (in relation to their total annual spending)? How are these resources allocated to different channels of communication? How much personnel is employed (if any) to take care of the communicational activities of an interest group? To gain an idea how communication is organized within a specific interest group, we ask if communication is normally handled by members or employees of the organization itself or outsourced to specialized contractors. As the question of tracking structural changes is difficult to measure with a quantitative instrument, a number of indicators for this dimension will be collected in a qualitative research design at a later point in our research project.

RQ3 (Behaviour): What repertoire of communication techniques do interest groups use in order to reach their defined target audiences (internal and external of the organization) and how has this repertoire changed during the last (ten) years?

We look at the specific communication instruments interest groups implement to get in touch with external actors (external communication), which tools they use to communicate with their members or constituencies (member communication) and how interest groups monitor their relevant environments. Additionally, we ask for the frequency of usage of the instruments the interest groups said they would use to get another measurement of how important certain instruments are in the communicational behaviour of the groups.

RQ4 (Differences between groups): Is there a difference in the extent of changes (perception, organizational structure, and communication repertoire) between different types of organizations?

Since interest groups are not all of the same type, differing in size, age, and in the policy areas they are active in, we are interested in differences between various types of organizations. The size, taken by the number of staff employed, for example, is an indicator of organizational complexity and it can be assumed that with higher complexity, the necessity increases to communicate professionally to internal and external environments. With regard to organizational age, we assume that older organizations are less flexible in changing their routines, including their communication strategies, while younger organizations were ‘born’ into a social and political context that they perceived as a mediatized political environment from the very beginning, thus installing organizational templates and routines that reflect the importance of media for their work. This of course has to be controlled for with regard to the different policy areas, since some areas – where e.g. strong civil society organizations

have achieved a public politicization of issues – are more easily covered by media and politics than others. The news values attached to certain issues give them an easier entry onto media agendas then issues of little salience. Nuclear protests or environmental issues are assumed to be in general more mediatized than the politics of tenant's rights, for example.

With regard to group-media relations, the highly developed Swiss media system is substantially diversified and has numerous access routes for interest groups. There is generally a close contact between interest representatives and journalists. We thus assume to see a strong connection and orientation of interest groups to the media which could result in a traceable mediatization of interest groups of the whole intermediary system. We have to take into account, though, that politics in Switzerland are, because it is a relatively small state, based to a large degree on informal networks of established personal contacts that are influential but only partly visible for the media. As the Swiss political system provides a number of entry points for political interest groups (such as institutionalized consultation processes) one might also hypothesize that interest groups in Switzerland are also to a high degree directly oriented to the political system. The importance of direct democratic instruments, such as referenda, which afford public resonance, might nevertheless lead to a sporadic orientation towards a more general public via the media.

5. Research Design

Following the method suggested by Wonka et al. (2010), we compiled different sources of data, merging registries and parliamentary consultations of relevant political interest groups in Switzerland. We arrived at a "proxy" of the population of interest groups we aim to investigate by drawing on sources like public encyclopaedias, public affairs handbooks, parliamentary registries, official consultation lists and internet data bases[2]. The quality of the sources was evaluated and pre-tested with interest group experts. We systematically screened the existing registries for Switzerland and coded all organizations that fulfil our definition. The different registries were then merged and duplicate entries deleted. In this coding process, we include the main level of the political activity, the location of the central office and internet and email addresses of the organizations and, where possible, of the organization's communication department. These email addresses were used as the mail out database for our online questionnaire. The questionnaire itself dealt with the position of the interest group in the political and media system. We were interested in the respondent's perception of intensity of political competition and the groups' frequency of political activity. This would allow us to later sort out policy amateurs from interest groups with a strong political interest. The tool covered the level of political activity and asked for the main addressees of their communication. With regard to communication repertoires, we were interested in which communication instruments are implemented by which groups in their external communication (i.e. to policy-makers, to journalists or the public), in their internal communication (to their members and supporters) and in monitoring their external environments.

6. First Results

In Switzerland, 2475 interest groups were contacted. 985 of these organizations completed the questionnaire, which amounts to a response rate of 40%. In the following, we will base our first descriptive results on the Swiss dataset[3].

In relation to our first research question outlined above (RQ1), table 1 shows that the media are perceived to be an important addressee of the communication of political interest groups (M = 3.48, SD = 1.0), but not the most important one of the addresses asked for in the question. An organization's own members (M = 4.0, SD = 1.1) are of bigger relevance, as well as government and

[2] For Switzerland: "Publicus", www.verbaende.ch, accreditation register to the Swiss Parliament, register of interests of Swiss MPs, organizations addressed in consultation processes 2010-11.

[3] Due to the initial assessment of the findings presented in this paper, we refrain from showing measures of statistical significance in the following. The findings presented here should thus be interpreted conservatively and cautiously.

administration (*M* = 3.72, *SD* = 1.1). Other political organizations, i.e. other associations and interest groups and political parties are clearly less important. While citizens would probably be among the most important addressees of the communication of political parties, they are not as important to interest groups.

Table 1: Importance of different addresses of the communication of interest groups in Switzerland

How important are the following contacts for the communication of your organisation?	*n*	*M*	*Mdn*	*SD*
Own members	985	4.15	4	0.9
Government and administration	985	3.72	4	1.1
Media	985	3.48	3	1
Other associations and interest groups	985	3.36	3	0.9
Parliamentary factions/parties	985	3.03	3	1.3
Citizens	985	2.71	3	1.1
Scientific/academic bodies	985	2.66	3	1

(Measured on a scale from 1 “not at all important” to 5 “extremely important”)

However, we would expect that interest group try to discern different channels in their communicational activities to which they attribute differing relevance. Empirical traces for our concept of mediatization would be visible in a considerable dependence of an interest group’s communication on mass media. They would especially perceive of TV and newspapers to be important, as theoretically, they would get the most public resonance by addressing these media. The differences in different types of media are shown in table 2. Surprisingly, is it not a classic mass medium which is seen as the most important one, but specialized publications and magazines (*M* = 3.45, *SD* = 1.1). Quality newspaper (*M* = 3.14, *SD* = 1.2) are also seen as important for the communication of interest groups in Switzerland, while all other types of media are of lesser importance. The fact that communication to specialized audiences is relevant is also seen by the relative importance of specialized media available online (*M* = 2.94, *SD* = 1.1). Public broadcasters (both TV and Radio) are more important than local or private TV or radio stations, which is easily understandable, as the Swiss national public broadcaster dominates the sector of electronic media to a considerable extent. Sunday papers, which follow Swiss politics closely and provide a good opportunity to reach a wider public, are also perceived somewhat less important than expected. It should be noted, that newer forms of online communication, such as addressing potentially influential fora in social network sites or important blogs are clearly the least important addressees of the communication of interest groups organizations. We might conclude already from these first results that the interest groups we studied in Switzerland did not perceive of the media to be as important as we expected. The media are of a certain importance in the communication of an organization, however, getting in touch with one’s own member base or being able to communicate to media, which are specialized on the field an organization is active in, is seen as clearly more important. These early findings, which are only descriptive, of course, could suggest that most of the organizations we studied in Switzerland are more oriented to their specific constituencies that in addressing a wider public.

Table 2: Importance of different types of media

How important are the following media for the communication of your organisation?	*n*	*M*	*Mdn*	*SD*
Specialised publications and magazines	985	3.45	3	1.1
(Trans-regional) quality newspapers	985	3.14	3	1.2
Specialised online media	985	2.94	3	1.1
Public Television broadcasters	985	2.92	3	1.3
Public radio broadcasters	985	2.91	3	1.2
Regional and local dailies	985	2.87	3	1.2
Online news portals	985	2.62	3	1.1
Sunday papers	985	2.61	2	1.2
Private radio broadcasters	985	2.57	3	1.1
Local Television broadcasters	985	2.43	2	1.1
Political magazines and weeklies	985	2.3	2	1.1
Social networks (e.g. Facebook, YouTube)	985	2.12	2	1.1
Certain blogs or Twitter users	985	1.82	2	0.8

(Measured on a scale from 1 “not at all important” to 5 “extremely important”)

To assess these findings further, we now look for differences between different types of interest groups. As with age, for example, we assume that political interest groups, who are ‘younger’, i.e. established only recently or in the last few years, tend to perceive of the media as more important than older organizations, which stem from a time in which the media were seen to be less predominant (Table 3).

Table 3: Importance of different addresses of the communication of interest groups in Switzerland, by age of the organization

Date of foundation	*n*	Government *M*	Parties *M*	Media *M*	Members *M*	Other IGs *M*	Citizens *M*	Scientific bodies *M*
1899 and older	100	3.80	3.34	3.63	4.26	3.33	2.78	2.59
1900 to 1919	101	3.84	3.32	3.63	4.13	3.24	2.89	2.52
1920 to 1945	121	3.64	2.90	3.39	4.19	3.41	2.54	2.54
1946 to 1959	92	3.79	3.01	3.40	4.07	3.35	2.63	2.61
1960 to 1969	55	3.43	2.75	3.44	4.07	3.30	2.72	2.66
1970 to 1979	118	3.80	3.05	3.48	4.24	3.43	2.63	2.79
1980 to 1989	95	3.55	2.72	3.34	4.01	3.47	2.66	2.80
1990 to 1999	127	3.84	3.07	3.50	4.17	3.42	2.87	2.72
2000 to 2011	176	3.67	3.01	3.45	4.12	3.31	2.70	2.68
Total	985	3.72	3.03	3.47	4.15	3.36	2.71	2.66

(Measured on a scale from 1 “not at all important” to 5 “extremely important”)

To this end, we asked the representatives of the interest groups to whom we sent our questionnaire to fill in the year in which their organization was founded. We then recoded these answers to arrive at categories which make both empirically and historically sense. We see that the biggest number of organizations in our sample was created only recently, i.e. in the 21st century. However, a considerable amount of organizations in our sample have existed also for more than a century already. The importance which is attributed to the media is again what interests us here the most. We find only limited support for our initial hypothesis, i.e. that ‘younger’ organizations tend to perceive the media as more important than ‘older’ organizations, though. We even find the highest importance attributed to the media as addressees of an interest group’s communication in rather ‘old’ organizations, organizations that were created either before 1899 ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 0.9$) or between

1900 and 1919 (M = 3.63, SD = 1.0), that is. What we see here is certainly no linear development of the importance attributed to the media in relationship to the date of foundation of a given interest group organization. The age of an organization thus helps us only little in explaining the importance attributed to the media in relation to other institutional environments of an organization. We do not see the pattern we might have expected, i.e. that the media are becoming increasingly important as addressees of the communication of an interest groups. Rather, the importance of addressees of the communication of interest groups rests more or less stable. Members, for example, are the most important addressees of the communication of interest groups, regardless of the time of its foundation.

As we have outlined in our research questions, we should control for these findings by looking at the policy field an organizations is predominantly active in. The representatives of the interest groups who participated in our survey were thus asked to tag the corresponding policy field. In Switzerland, 19% of the organizations did not use one of the policy fields we provided which were based on the typology suggested by Sebaldt and Strassner (2004). Rather, they filled in their area of activity by making use of the text box we integrated in the questionnaire. However, we were able to recode these policy fields *ex-post* and to integrate it in the typology originally foreseen (Table 4).

Table 4: Importance of different addresses of the communication of interest groups in Switzerland, by policy field an interest group is mainly active in

Policy field	*n*	Government *M*	Parties *M*	Media *M*	Members *M*	Other IGs *M*	Citizens *M*	Scientific bodies *M*
Business and work	356	3.76	3.14	3.50	4.24	3.38	2.52	2.45
Social life	52	3.42	2.85	3.49	4.04	3.27	3.12	2.49
Health	116	3.87	3.24	3.61	4.15	3.48	3.04	2.96
Leisure	82	3.10	2.26	3.44	3.99	2.99	2.54	2.14
Culture	47	3.47	2.65	3.43	4.24	3.59	2.72	2.60
Education	97	3.88	2.66	3.09	4.17	3.40	2.38	2.85
Science	39	3.34	2.44	2.85	3.95	3.28	2.24	3.82
Religion/secularism	*17	3.00	2.73	3.18	3.81	3.06	2.93	2.40
Politics	101	4.14	3.89	3.78	4.20	3.42	3.18	2.73
Environment	50	3.98	3.06	3.74	3.94	3.40	3.06	3.02
Other field	**4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
n.a.	24	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	985	3.72	3.03	3.47	4.15	3.36	2.71	2.65

(Measured on a scale from 1 “not at all important” to 5 “extremely important”)

(*to be interpreted cautiously due to small sample sizes)

(**not shown due to small sample sizes)

For organizations from the policy field “politics”, under which Sebaldt and Strassner (2004) summarize interest groups commonly labelled as “public interest groups”, the media appear to be most important (M = 3.78, SD = 1.1). We also see relatively high importance attributed to media from organizations stemming from the policy fields “environment” (M = 3.74, SD = 1.3) and “health” (M = 3.74, SD = 1.1). All in all, the media seem to be at least “important” as addressees of the communication of interest groups from all the policy fields we included in the question in Switzerland. Only organizations with a scientific background tend to see the media as somewhat less important (M = 2.85, SD = 1.0). These findings are more in line with the picture we expected to get initially: Organizations from policy fields which are assumed to be to a larger extent observed by the media, and in this sense “mediatized”, like, for example, politics, environment or health, also attribute the highest relevance, relatively, to the media as addressees of their communication. In any case, however, it should not be forgotten that an organization’s members persist to be the most important addressees of communication, expect for environmental organizations, which tend to see the government as more important (M = 3.98, SD = 1.0).

Furthermore, we look at the size of the interest groups included in our sample (Table 5). 61 organizations in our sample do not at all have employees and are in this respect considered to be "policy amateurs". This does not mean that these organizations are not politically active, but only, that they do not have any paid personnel employed and that they rather depend on voluntary contributions from their members. Most organizations, however, have a work force ranging from between 1 to 1000 employee percentages, signifying that we are dealing mainly with rather small organizations. The figures, however, give us no clear measure of the number of persons employed in an organization, but rather an indication of the sum of work carried out by persons which are employed by a specific interest group, thus arriving at a measure which is comparable over organization, policy field, and country, eventually.

Table 5: Importance of different addresses of the communication of interest groups in Switzerland, by total personnel employed in an interest group, expressed in employee percentages

Personnel, in employee percentages	*n*	Government *M*	Parties *M*	Media *M*	Members *M*	Other IGs *M*	Citizens *M*	Scientific bodies *M*
No personnel	61	3.56	2.47	2.97	4.03	3.17	2.53	2.68
1 to 99%	192	3.46	2.79	3.22	4.15	3.31	2.54	2.73
100 to 399%	241	3.80	3.08	3.47	4.17	3.45	2.69	2.61
400 to 999%	170	3.91	3.27	3.66	4.09	3.34	2.66	2.75
1000 to 1999%	67	3.86	3.30	3.73	4.14	3.48	2.85	2.63
2000 to 4999	68	4.09	3.52	3.86	4.13	3.45	2.92	2.56
More than 5000%	47	3.91	3.20	3.89	4.11	3.39	3.04	2.40
n.a.	139	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	985	3.72	3.03	3.47	4.15	3.36	2.71	2.66

(Measured on a scale from 1 "not at all important" to 5 "extremely important")

The picture we get here in regard to our hypothesis of "mediatization" is clearer: the more personnel is employed professionally by an interest groups, the more important it tends to see the media as addressees of its communication. Organizations with at least 5000 employee percentages (which can be translated to roughly 50 persons employed by an organizations and thus have to considered as rather 'big' political interest groups, in Swiss terms) perceive of the media as most important (M = 3.89, SD = 0.9). For organizations which have no personnel (or only volunteers working for the organizations), the media are clearly less important in their communicational activities (M = 2.97, SD = 1.2). We can think of these rather 'big' organizations as being more "professionalized" and internally more diversified which could have led to the creation of specific departments or the implementation of personnel dealing specifically with communication and/or the media. Thus, these organizations tend to see the media also as more relevant in their day-to-day working routine.

Moreover, we take a look at the dimension of "behaviour" of our definition of mediatization proposed earlier. Tables 6, 7, and 8 show the communication instruments in use by interest groups in Switzerland and their relative change of importance in recent years. The change of importance is again connected to an organization's perception of the media. To get a look at the overall communication repertoire of instruments implemented by an organization, we asked separately for instruments used to communicate externally (Table 6), internally, i.e. to members (Table 7), and instruments used to gather information and monitor the wider environment of an organization (Table 8).

Table 6: Communication instruments used externally by interest groups in Switzerland, ordered by their relative change in importance

Changes in the importance of communication instruments (external)	*n*	*M*	*Used by (%)*
Activities in social networks (e.g. Facebook, YouTube)	985	1.45	21.8
Operating and maintaining a website	985	1.32	90.7
Operating and maintaining a blog or a Twitter account	985	1.29	7.3
Sending out a newsletter by email	985	1.02	58.1
Direct contact with political decision-makers (e.g. personal or telephone contact)	985	0.77	75.6
Directly approaching journalists (e.g. personally or by telephone)	985	0.62	63.6
Holding events for special target groups (e.g. for entrepreneurs, young people)	985	0.35	59.0
Holding events with direct contact to citizens (e.g. campaigning at a booth)	985	0.31	26.2
Commissioning or carrying out your own studies	985	0.30	37.8
Sending out press releases	985	0.24	72.6
Organisation of public demonstrations and protests	985	0.23	9.7
Issuing informative material (brochures, flyers, publications, etc.)	985	0.18	79.7
Production and publication of advertising material	985	0.17	26.2
Holding public events (e.g. panel discussions)	985	0.13	45.4
Organising press conferences	985	-0.02	37.7

(Measured on a scale from 1 “has clearly become less important”, 2 “has become somewhat less important”, 3 “has remained the same”, 4 “has become somewhat more important”, to 5 “has clearly become more important”. Values have then been recoded to a scale from -2 “has clearly become less important” to 2 “has clearly become more important to ease interpretation. A value of 0 thus means that there is no change in perceived importance of the respective communication activity)

Not surprisingly, as seen in table 6, we see that 90.7% of the organizations in our sample operate and maintain a website as part of their external communication. This relatively high value is unquestionably due to our method of sampling, as we integrated only organizations in our mail out database from which we were able to assign an email address to. The issuing of informative materials (79.9%), such as brochures, flyers or other kinds of publications, direct contacts to political decision-makers (75.6%), either face-to-face or by telephone, e.g., and the sending out of press releases (72.6%) are also done by the large majority of the organizations represented in our sample. Direct contacts with journalists are also made use of frequently (63.6%), while this finding also reflects the fact that some organizations might simply not have the respective direct connections to journalists. Interestingly, interest groups in Switzerland do not extensively organize events with the aim of contacting citizens in a face-to-face manner (26.2%). While this method of reaching wider audiences is very common for political parties in Switzerland, which take their campaigning to the streets or public places, interest groups tend to implement this instrument less often. This finding is in line with what we have concluded earlier, i.e. that interest groups are more active in thematically segmented fora and are to a lesser degree interested in reaching the general public. “Newer” instruments of online communication, such as communicating on social network sites (21.8%) or operating and maintaining a blog or Twitter account (7.3%) to reach persons external to their organizations are used only marginally up to now. The organization of public demonstration or protests also seems to be the instrument of choice only for certain interest groups (9.7%). Press conferences are held by fewer organizations (37.7%) than we would have expected according to our research question in relation to “mediatization”.

Table 7: Communication instruments used internally by interest groups in Switzerland, ordered by their relative change in importance

Changes in the importance of communication instruments (internal)	*n*	*M*	*Used by (%)*
Use of social networks for exchange with members	985	1.31	13.2
Operation and maintenance of a blog or a Twitter account	985	1.18	5.4
Sending out a newsletter by email	985	0.98	67.6
(Password-protected) members' area on the website	985	0.97	41.9
Administration of a mailing list	985	0.80	64.3
Direct contact with members (e.g. individual / personal information)	985	0.63	78.0
Holding special events for members (e.g. topical events or information evenings)	985	0.38	74.0
Holding regular events for members (e.g. members' meetings or AGM)	985	0.10	87.8
Issuing and sending out a members' magazine/circular (in printed form)	985	0.09	62.5

(See note below table 6)

When turning to the instruments implemented by interest groups in Switzerland in order to communicate internally, i.e. to their own members, we see on the one hand the frequent implementation of regular events for members (87.8%), which can be explained by the fact that most of the organizations are obliged to do so by their statutes. On the other hand, the importance of members we have seen above is reflected by the number of organizations which have direct contact or exchange with their members (78.0%). Still, a considerable number of organizations do not seem to enjoy direct contacts with their constituencies. Again, newer forms of online communication are used to a somewhat lesser extent.

Table 8: Communication instruments used to gather information and to monitor the environment by interest groups in Switzerland, ordered by their relative change in importance

Changes in the importance of communication instruments (monitoring)	*n*	*M*	*Used by (%)*
Web monitoring/systematic online observation	985	1.15	25.2
Citizen surveys	985	0.43	9.1
Member surveys	985	0.40	59.0
Press reviews/press services	985	0.39	57.5
Expert surveys	985	0.39	40.3
Recording of Television broadcasts	985	0.32	22.6
Content analysis of press articles	985	0.31	36.0

(See note below table 6)

The importance of members is also seen in table 8. Surveys among members (59.0%) are the tool implemented most frequently in this dimension of the communication of an organization. The media are certainly important to gather information and monitor the environment for an organization, as 57.5% of the organizations in our sample regularly and consistently observe the media. Again, citizens are less important, as only 9.1% of the interest groups in our sample conduct surveys among citizens to gather relevant information for their work.

In tables 6, 7, and 8, we included also the relative change in importance of the communication instruments implemented by an interest group. Strikingly, we observe the increasing importance of tools for online communication. These findings are similar across all dimension of the communication repertoire of interest groups in Switzerland, no matter if the respective tool is used to communicate externally, internally, or in order to monitor the environment of an organization. The increasing relevance of these new forms of communication seems to reflect the growing importance of online communication perceived in society in general (Bentivegna, 2006, p. 334). However, we must not forget that these new forms of communication, such as the presence in social network sites, blogging, or web monitoring, are still used by relatively few organizations. Only the operation and maintenance

of a website is widely implemented and has considerably become more important in the past few years. With regard to "mediatization", the findings we get here are not as easy interpretable. While direct contacts with journals have increased (M = 0.62, SD = 0.8), direct contacts with political decision-makers have become even more important in the same time period (M = 0.77, SD = 0.9). Additionally, the sending out of press releases has only slightly increased (M = 0.24, SD = 0.8). Organising press conferences (M = -0.02, SD = 0.9) is the only communication instrument of which the importance is perceived to be (slightly) decreasing. Cautiously interpreted, these findings do not point in the direction of a unidirectional, linear increase in the importance of the media, but more to a shift towards more flexible and more direct instruments of communication, while the "established" forms of (external) communication, such as the direct contact to political decision-makers, rest important or simultaneously become even more important.

Finally, we conclude our first cursory analysis of the interest groups we surveyed in Switzerland by looking at the resources they allocate to communication. Table 9 highlights that our sample consists of rather heterogeneous interest groups in means of their overall annual budget, as expressed by the considerably big standard deviation. Communication seems to be of certain importance, as 22.2% of an organization's overall annual budget is dedicated to communicational activities in general. While external communication is important (M = 12.6, SD = 16.2), more resources are allocated to the communication to members (M = 16.8, SD = 18.7), a finding which is consistent with our prior observation highlighting the relevance of members and the communication to them. The increasing importance of online communication is underlined by the fact that on average, already 8.0% (SD = 10.2) of an organization's resources are dedicated to these forms of communication.

Table 9: Resources allocated to communication by interest groups in Switzerland

Structural information	*n*	*M*	*Mdn*	*SD*
Overall annual budget	985	3'369'593.37	250000.0	30886648.9
Communication expenses in general (share in %)	985	22.2	15.0	20.5
Expenses for external communication (share in %)	985	12.6	5.0	16.2
Expenses for member communication (share in %)	985	16.8	10.0	18.7
Expenses for monitoring (share in %)	985	3.5	1.0	5.2
Expenses for online communication (share in %)	985	8.0	5.0	10.2
Employees – total (employment percentage)	985	3566.4	252.5	57043.4
Employees – general communication (employment percentage)	985	108.4	50.0	207.2
Employees – online communication (employment percentage)	985	40.9	10.0	75.1

With regard to the personnel employed by interest groups in Switzerland, an interest group in Switzerland is stocked with 3566.4 employee percentages on average. Again, the large standard deviation from this mean should be noted. We also see that communication is an activity to which resources are allocated up to a considerable amount, represented by the 108.4 employment percentages (SD = 207.2) dedicated to this part of their work.

7. Conclusions

In this paper, we have tried to embed the changes and challenges interest groups are confronted with in most Western democracies today in a more general and system-wide perspective. We have argued that the challenges we can observe have one common denominator, as we can trace relationships in all of these to a supposedly growing influence of the media. We have suggested a definition of "mediatization" which is conceptualized as a reaction of political interest groups, or political organizations more generally, to the increasing importance of media.

Our first descriptive analysis of the Swiss dataset give only limited support for our initial hypothesis, i.e. that the media are of consistently growing importance to the activities of interest groups. The media can be seen as important, and are possibly becoming more important. Of greater importance, however, is the communication of an interest group to its own member base. Interest groups are, as it

seems even in Switzerland, to a lesser degree reliable on reaching wider audiences. What they are concerned most about is maintaining their communicative relationship to their constituencies. In this aim, newer forms of online communication are possibly seen as a viable tool to directly reach their supporters. The first results presented in this paper were thus in line with earlier research we conducted on the mediatization of political parties (Donges, 2008; Vogel, 2010). The media are important and could lead to changes in perception, structure, and behaviour, but possibly no to the extent we might have expected, as interest groups have other institutional environments with which they interact. These descriptive initial findings from Switzerland, however, have to be assessed further in order to arrive at a more consistent picture of a possible “mediatization” of political interest groups.

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